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Letter dated 9 December 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to convey the attached communication dated 28 November 2008 which I received from the Deputy Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

08-64207 (E) 161208

Annex

Letter dated 28 November 2008 from the Deputy Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolutions 1386 (2001) and 1510 (2003), I attach a report on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force covering the period from May to July 2008 (see enclosure). I would appreciate your making the report available to the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Claudio **Bisogniero**

Enclosure

Quarterly report to the United Nations on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force

1. The present report covers the period from 1 May to 31 July 2008. As at 25 July 2008, the strength of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) stood at 49,101 personnel from the 26 NATO nations and 2,215 from 14 non-NATO nations.

2. Throughout the reporting period ISAF continued to assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions. Key themes are that:

(a) ISAF continued to conduct security operations while supporting governance, reconstruction and development. Security operations focused on disrupting and defeating the threat from opposing militant forces while simultaneously developing the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces;

(b) The Afghan National Army increased in size and capability during the reporting period. Combined Afghan National Security Forces/ISAF operations built on previous successes in order to counter opposing militant forces intentions and undermine their capacity for future actions. The greatest challenge to the security of Afghanistan continued to be found in the southern and eastern portions of the country, where additional forces, both ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces, have made a very significant contribution to the mission.

Security situation

3. The activity of opposing militant forces throughout Afghanistan during the reporting period was higher than the same period in 2007. For the most part, their tactics focused on small-scale, asymmetric attacks rather than large-scale, force-on-force engagements against ISAF and Coalition Forces. Also, many opposing militant forces attacks continued to be directed against the Afghan National Security Forces, especially the Afghan National Police and civilians who work for or support the Government. Opposing militant forces attacks that inflicted the greatest numbers of casualties primarily utilized improvised explosive devices, which accounted for the overwhelming majority of Afghan civilian casualties. The opposing militant forces strategy continued to be centred on discrediting and undermining the authority of the Government, as well as ISAF and the international community, in order to influence the population, thus creating favourable conditions that would be conducive to the establishment of a radical Islamic Government within Afghanistan. The regional security situations were as follows:

(a) *Regional Command Capital*. Opposing militant forces activity increased slightly but was within expected seasonal norms. The potential for "high visibility" attacks against high-value/high-payoff targets remained constant. The suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack on the Indian embassy was an example of the type of spectacular attack that opposing militant forces strive to achieve in Kabul city. Opposing militant forces weapons caches in the capital and its surroundings were discovered by the International Security Assistance Force with the help of local nationals, a positive sign of increasing will to cooperate by Afghan locals against opposing militant forces;

(b) *Regional Command North*. Opposing militant forces activity within Regional Command North remained within historical norms. Criminal activity and illegal armed groups continued to be the primary threats to stability. Although the Taliban may have had ambitions to establish a greater presence outside of Pashtun pockets, regional and local power brokers as well as the non-Pashtun ethnic population continued to limit Taliban influence;

(c) *Regional Command West*. Opposing militant forces activity slightly increased during the reporting period, particularly in areas adjacent to Regional Command South. This is assessed to be due to the effects of continued ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces security operations against opposing militant forces in Regional Command South;

(d) *Regional Command South*. Regional Command South continued to be the focus of the opposing militant forces main effort, despite the death or capture of a number of opposing militant forces leaders. ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces operations disrupted opposing militant forces activity within many traditional Taliban areas of operation. Taliban in Regional Command South, deeply anchored into the population, nevertheless remained the primary threat to regional stability during the reporting period and continued to possess the capability to conduct a range of attacks against ISAF, Coalition and Government forces;

(e) *Regional Command East*. Insurgent activity in Regional Command East increased significantly compared to last year, particularly along the Afghan/Pakistan border. Opposing militant forces groups routinely transited the porous border in order to conduct hit-and-run attacks against the International Security Assistance Force, Coalition and Government forces before retreating back across the border into Pakistan. The opposing militant forces attack against combat outpost Waynat (also known as combat outpost Kahler) in Kunar Province demonstrated the ability of opposing militant forces to conduct punctual large-scale direct attacks against ISAF and Coalition Forces if conditions are favourable.

Afghan National Army

4. The Afghan National Army continued to improve in terms of both strength and capability, as evidenced by several additional formations achieving full operational capability during the reporting period. Limited international assistance with Afghan National Army training initiatives, the shortage of mentor teams, and the lack of adequate equipment support continued to hamper the overall pace of development.

(a) *Capability*. The Afghan National Army continued to develop into a respected and professional force, with over half of Afghan National Army units partially capable of conducting counter-insurgency operations with ISAF and Coalition Forces support. The remaining units grew in capability and are expected to meet developmental goals in accordance with established timelines. Afghan National Army participation in security and stability operations continued to climb, mirroring the Army's growth in capability and capacity, with more than half of ISAF operations conducted jointly with Army units;

(b) *Manning*. The manning of the Afghan National Army continued to grow steadily, with approximately 60,000 personnel currently assigned by the end of the reporting period. "Present for duty" numbers increased proportionally, with approximately 35,000 personnel available for operations in July 2008;

(c) *Equipment*. The equipment situation improved, albeit at a slower rate than desired. The fielding to priority units of a limited number of weapons provided by the United States of America progressed;

(d) *Training*. The failure to source the required number of operational mentoring and liaison teams continues to be the most significant contributing factor restricting ISAF ability to accelerate the pace of Afghan National Army development. Sourcing additional teams therefore remained the number one force-generation priority of NATO.

Afghan National Police

5. Although the efforts of the international community to enhance Afghan National Police capabilities by transforming the Afghan uniformed police into a service loyal to the Afghan people and Afghan national interests continued, the Afghan National Police still requires significant support to transform it into a "fit-to-purpose" security institution. Having reached the level of approximately 78,000 personnel during the reporting period, the Afghan National Police continued to rely on substantial support from the international community in order to support security operations in Afghanistan. The focused district development programme, conducted by the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan during the reporting period, remained the primary focus of support to Afghan National Police development. An acute shortage of police mentor teams remains a critical challenge to the continued implementation of the programme across Afghanistan.

Counter-narcotics

6. The link between the illegal narcotics industry and opposing militant forces was further confirmed during the reporting period, and continues to fuel instability and corruption. This continues to threaten all levels of governance, including police authority and the wider rule of law. Ultimately, the effect of the illegal narcotics trade jeopardizes meaningful reconstruction and development. Key points are that:

(a) ISAF support to counter-narcotics operations focuses on cross-agency coordination with the Ministries of the Interior, Counter-narcotics and Defence, as well as with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime;

(b) Within its mandate and resources, ISAF supported the Afghan Special Narcotics Force and the National Interdiction Unit, which are the key Afghan interdiction forces. The Government, supported by ISAF, conducted a pre-planting information operation campaign that appeared to have achieved some positive results. ISAF also provided logistical support to a number of Afghan interdiction operations.

Neighbouring countries

7. Movement of opposing militant forces between Pakistan and Afghanistan persisted across what is a largely porous border. Criminal elements continue to use smuggling routes across Central Asian countries neighbouring Afghanistan to access Europe and Asia. Reports of foreign fighters arriving in Afghanistan from Central Asia continued as well.

Judicial reform and rule of law

8. There was no significant change from the last reporting period. Public access to justice remains limited. The prison system continues to lack sufficient infrastructure and personnel, and the majority of Afghans were unaware of their rights and the legal process. The judicial system continues to remain weak with widespread corruption. Slight progress was noted with respect to judicial training.

Governance

9. The military mission of ISAF, as mandated by the relevant Security Council resolutions, is intended to assist the Government in providing security across Afghanistan. Events on the ground during the reporting period reinforced the view that security, development and governance are interdependent. Reinforcing the positive influence of the creation of the Afghan Independent Directorate of Local Governance, ISAF continued to engage with the Afghan Government at all levels in order to help extend its authority and improve its capabilities. Provincial reconstruction team leadership remained vital in buttressing the Government's authority against the effects of continued efforts by the opposing militant forces and/or criminal elements to frustrate this process. Deeper and wider engagement of the central Government and proof of its impartial beneficiary effects for the whole population, at the grass-roots level, remained a priority for sustained improvements. Capacity-building at all levels of the Administration remains a prerequisite for extending Government authority.

Development

10. The Joint Force Command Brunssum provincial reconstruction team conference held in May 2008, with participants from ISAF troop-contributing nations, the international community and the Government, provided a venue for coordinating long-term guidance and direction. The outcome was an action plan to further align NATO support for reconstruction and development with the Afghan national development strategy. In terms of building better governance, it was agreed that provincial reconstruction teams should provide support to the five-year plan of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance. This could best be achieved through enhanced coordination with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan at the regional level as well as increased emphasis from a reinvigorated provincial reconstruction team executive steering committee, co-chaired by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance rather than the Ministry of the Interior.